

COVID-19 UPDATE 11/11/20

GRR FIRE DEPARTMENT

Let's use a little imagination to understand how COVID-19 is spread. Picture this: a person wearing white coveralls mixes Chanel No5 with water-soluble red ink in a perfume atomizer and holds it next to their mouth. They aim the atomizer in line with the direction of their mouth. They give the atomizer one puff each time they breathe, with extra hard puffs when they talk. They do this for a full day of normal daily activities, including cooking, eating, shopping, going to visit a friend.

Imagine how much ink spray will end up on their clothing, their hands, their shoes. Imagine how much ink ends up on their floors, furniture, the dining room table, the kitchen counter and the food they prepare; the steering wheel and interior of their vehicle when they go to the grocery store; the cart and packages at the store; the credit card they use to pay for their food; their friend's door knob, their friend's home. Now, imagine how long the odor of the Chanel lingers after they move from place to place.

How do you clean up the mess they leave? You wipe off the surfaces contaminated by the ink—the eating utensils, door knobs, steering wheel, tables, etc; you wash your hands after you touch inky things; you stay more than 6-feet away from them to not get the ink on your clothing or face. You don't hug them or shake their hand.

Now, imagine you could put a mask in front of the atomizer and how much less spray would go everywhere, even though the mask might get rather nasty after a time.

People are atomizers. We spray droplets equivalent to the ink every time we breathe, more when we talk, even more when we talk loudly or sing, and we positively spew when we cough. The spray from a cough can travel over 12 feet and a sneeze can go 27 feet! We put out particles like the ink that, with quiet breathing and quiet conversation, mostly drop within 6 feet of our mouths. However, some of these particles are so tiny they remain in the air for hours afterward, like the lingering aroma of a perfume. When someone has COVID-19—even without symptoms, or before they can occur—the droplets they atomize are infectious. (The same goes for colds and the flu.) They get on everything that person is within 6 feet of and in the air surrounding them, even after they leave a room.

The simple act of putting a 2- to 3-layer cloth face mask on that human atomizer significantly reduces the amount of spray they share with everyone around; the exact amount varies with the mask, its fit, and the material used. The distance the particles travels is dramatically reduced: to as little as 6 inches with a cough. Here is a link to a video:

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2020/05/04/cough-coronavirus-masks-kaye-pkg-vpx.cnn>.

A person wearing a cloth face mask reduces the likelihood they will get their particles into your mouth and nose. If you wear a mask, you reduce that even further. Washing your hands or using hand sanitizer drops your risk of infection further, since almost no human can completely avoid touching their eyes, nose, mouth, or face all the time.

The Gallatin City County Health Department website provides the most authoritative local information about COVID-19, <https://www.healthygallatin.org/>. For additional information and updates, go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

What does GRR Fire Recommend?

Wear a cloth face mask when in public places shared by others:

1. This is not a matter of politics; it is a matter of respect for the others we share our stores and public spaces with. The science is clear and unequivocal.
2. Wear a mask when traveling in enclosed spaces with others—in vehicles, airplanes, busses.
3. Wear face masks to the greatest extent at gatherings, in church, at restaurants and bars, at the coffee shop, at the gym.
 - a. Of course, it is not possible to wear face masks continuously in those venues, but the more you wear it, the better you protect yourself and the others around you.
4. Face masks are how we keep work safer for ourselves and others.
5. Face masks are how we get America back to work.

Practice good hand hygiene:

1. Vigorous hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water after contact with surfaces you don't control, such as at stores or other public places.
2. Wash them immediately when you get home after going to stores or other public places.
3. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
 - a. Use them before entering and after exiting stores or other public buildings.
4. Consider wearing disposable gloves when filling up at the gas station or touching surfaces prone to high degrees of viral and bacterial contamination.

Socially distance

1. Stay 6 feet away from others aside from household contacts whenever possible.
2. That means no handshakes, hugs, or kisses.
3. Avoid large gatherings where others may not practice good distancing, hand hygiene, or mask use.
 - a. Bars are probably the worst offenders.
 - b. Weddings, funerals, and parties have become “super-spreader” events.
 - c. Even smaller family gatherings have led to multiple infections, something to think long and hard about during holidays. Be particularly mindful of the risk to older adults and those with compromised immune systems.

Avoid touching your face when outside your home

1. If you must rub your nose or eyes, then disinfect your hands with alcohol hand sanitizer immediately.

Stay at home if you feel sick

- d. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 contact your health provider by email or phone. If you don't have a healthcare provider, contact the Gallatin City County Public Health Department.
- e. Do not leave home until cleared by your healthcare provider.
- f. If you live with others, see the section about taking care of COVID-19 patients at home.
- g. This includes all respiratory infections, including colds and the "flu".

Create your own "protective bubbles"

1. Your vehicles:
 - a. Use alcohol hand sanitizer before entering your vehicle when away from home.
 - b. Drive alone or with household members as much as possible.
 - i. Wear a mask if you ride with a person who is not a household member.
 - ii. Insist that others wear masks if you ride with them.
 - c. Disinfect touched surfaces regularly using an FDA-approved viral disinfectant.
 - i. Disinfect them if you suspect contamination.
 - ii. Disinfect after anyone other than a household member rides in the vehicle with you.
 - iii. Disinfect your vehicle keys/fobs.
 - d. Wear face masks when riding with non-household contacts, even relatives or friends.
2. Your home:
 - a. Disinfect surfaces you might touch after leaving home or shopping:
 - i. Outside doorknobs, locks, and touched door surfaces.
 - ii. The kitchen countertop.
 - b. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water as soon as you walk in the house.
 - c. Consider leaving your shoes at the entry to not carry floor contaminants into the home.
 - d. Don't forget to disinfect your cell phone if you touched it while outside the home.
 - e. Minimize house guests.
 - i. It is no longer offensive to ask visitors and guests if they are or have recently been ill with a respiratory infection.
 - ii. Entertain in only small numbers and preferably outdoors.
 - iii. Consider wearing a face mask and ask your guests to do the same.
 - f. If you have children:
 - i. Make them use hand sanitizer before getting in your vehicle on trips, shopping, or after school.
 - ii. Make them use hand sanitizer before coming into the home.
 - iii. Make them wash their hands after coming into the home.
 - iv. Keep them home if they get a cold, fever, 'flu' or have any COVID-19 symptoms.

Cold and Flu Season Recommendations

Get a flu shot

1. The symptoms of influenza are the same as COVID-19. The two are easily confused, and the only way to tell them apart is by testing.
2. Influenza vaccination, on average, decreases your chances of getting influenza by about 50-60%. Those immunized who still get it generally have a milder illness and less risk of hospitalization or death.

Avoid spreading colds and the flu

1. While the COVID-19 pandemic rages, medical providers have to assume anyone with cold or flu symptoms have COVID-19 until or unless proven otherwise.
 - a. People with these symptoms must be off work until their symptoms are gone, testing or no testing.
 - b. People with a cold or the flu must not spread those infections to others, who will then have to undergo testing and quarantine.
 - c. The economic, educational, and work-related losses due to colds and flu will be very significant during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Avoiding spreading colds and flu is simple:
 - a. Don't send your kids to school with a cold or the flu.
 - b. Get a flu shot.
 - c. Take the COVID-19 prevention recommendations above.
 - i. It turns out that the COVID-19 prevention steps such as face mask use, social distancing, and hand hygiene are very effective preventers of colds and flu.

I've Already Had COVID-19, Do I have to do any of this?

YES.

1. You can still get colds and the flu. If you do, you will still have to be off work and quarantine until tests confirm that you don't have a recurrent case of COVID-19.
2. The duration of immunity after a COVID-19 infection is not known, but there are cases where people have caught it a second time.
3. You have a responsibility to prevent others from getting your cold or flu, with the consequences as discussed above.
4. So, Yes, you should take all the same precautions as if you didn't have COVID-19 in order to lessen your risk of getting those infections and transmitting them on to others, including loved ones and coworkers.
5. For the same reason, after a vaccine becomes available, those vaccinated should still follow all the recommendations above.